

DIGESTIVE HEALTH AND DISEASE:

A GLOSSARY

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Abdomen—The large cavity between the chest and the pelvis containing the stomach, small intestine, colon (large bowel), liver, gallbladder, and spleen.

Abdomino-perineal resection—A surgical procedure in which the end portion of the colon (sigmoid colon) and the entire rectum and anus are removed. The end of the remaining colon is brought to the surface of the body as a permanent colostomy.

Abnormality—The state of being not normal; differing in any way from the usual state, structure, or condition.

Abscess—A localized pocket of pus.

Absorption—The process in which food nutrients are taken from the intestinal lumen into the bloodstream for distribution to all cells in the body.

Acute—Having a short and relatively severe course.

Adhesion—An internal growth of scar tissue that may occur following abdominal surgery.

Albumin—A protein found in nearly every animal tissue.

Alcoholism—Chronic, excessive, and compulsive drinking that interferes with social or economic functioning. Alcoholism adversely affects the health of the alcoholic, particularly in the nervous and gastrointestinal systems.

Amino acids—The basic building blocks of proteins, made by all living cells. They are essential to life.

Anastomosis—The surgical formation of a passage-way between any two spaces or hollow organs in the body.

Anemia—A condition in which the number of red blood cells, the amount of hemoglobin, or the volume of packed red blood cells are less than normal.

Antacid—A medicine that counteracts or neutralizes acids, usually in the stomach or duodenum.

Antidiarrheal drugs—Drugs that help to control diarrhea.

Antispasmodic drugs—Drugs that lessen the severity of intestinal muscle spasms (cramps).

Antrectomy—A surgical procedure in which the portion of the stomach is removed that produces the hormones that cause acid secretion.

Anus—The lower opening of the digestive tract through which feces (bowel movements) are discharged.

Arteriography—A diagnostic procedure used to detect disease in blood vessels or solid organs and to diagnose and treat severe bleeding. A special dye injected into the blood vessels allows them to be seen on x-ray.

Ascites—An accumulation of fluid in the abdominal cavity.

Autoimmunity—The condition in which antibodies are produced against the body's own tissues.

Bacteria—Synonym for germs. As single-cell organisms found almost everywhere, some bacteria help make cheese and wine, some assist in the digestive process, and some cause disease.

Barium—The main ingredient of barium sulfate, given by mouth or rectum to patients undergoing one or more of the tests in the barium studies. Barium sulfate outlines the hollow organs of the digestive tract and makes them visible on x-ray images and under the fluoroscope.

Barium enema—Lower gastrointestinal (GI) series. A diagnostic procedure in which x-rays are taken after barium sulfate is introduced into the patient by enema. The barium sulfate helps to outline the colon and rectum so that they appear clearly on the x-rays.

Barium meal—Upper gastrointestinal (GI) series. A diagnostic procedure in which x-rays are taken after the patient swallows barium sulfate. The barium sulfate helps to outline the esophagus, stomach, and duodenum so that they appear clearly on the x-rays.

Barrett's esophagus—A change in the cell surface of the lower esophagus resulting from a long-term irritation caused by the backwash of acid from the stomach into the esophagus.

Benign—Noncancerous, harmless.

Bernstein test—A diagnostic procedure used to determine whether heartburn symptoms are caused by acid coming up from the stomach and irritating the esophagus. The test consists of dripping a mild acid, resembling stomach acid, through a tube that has been placed in the esophagus and waiting to see if discomfort develops.

Bile—A complex fluid, produced by the liver and stored in the gallbladder, that aids in the digestion of fats and is used by the body to dispose of wastes that do not dissolve in water.

Bile acids—Weak acids (formed in the body from cholesterol) that are secreted by the liver and act as detergents aiding in the digestion of fats.

Bile ducts—The system of tubes that carries bile from the liver to the gallbladder and, when needed, to the intestine.

Biliary atresia—A congenital condition in which bile from the liver cannot reach the intestine because the bile ducts have developed poorly or not at all.

Bilirubin—A yellow pigment formed from hemoglobin when red blood cells are broken down. In jaundice, there is an increased level of bilirubin in the blood and tissues. Jaundice is most easily detected in the whites of the eyes.

Biopsy—A diagnostic procedure in which a small piece of tissue is removed for examination under a microscope.

Bloating—A feeling of fullness in the abdomen, often occurring after meals.

Bypass procedure—A surgical procedure in which a detour is created from one part of the GI tract to another.

Carcinoma—A cancerous growth that occurs in the tissues that cover the internal and external surfaces of the body.

Cecum—A dilated pouch that forms the first part of the large intestine and connects the colon to the ileum.

Celiac sprue (celiac disease, gluten intolerance, non-tropical sprue, gluten sensitive enteropathy)—An inherited disorder in which the lining of the small intestine is damaged when the affected individual eats wheat, rye, oats, or barley. Gluten, a protein in these grains, is thought to be the offending agent.

Cellulose—A kind of dietary fiber that is resistant to digestion by humans. Cellulose is the basic constituent of all vegetable tissues and the most abundant organic material in the world.

Chenodeoxycholic acid—A drug, identical to one of the natural bile acids, that can dissolve cholesterol gallstones in certain patients.

Cholecystectomy—Surgical removal of the gallbladder.

Cholecystitis—Inflammation of the gallbladder.

Cholecystography (oral)—A diagnostic test in which an x-ray is taken of the gallbladder after the patient has swallowed pills containing a special dye. The dye is absorbed from the intestine and then passed into the bile to reach the gallbladder. The patient must take the dye the night before the test is performed and may not eat until after the x-ray has been taken.

Cholesterol—The most abundant sterol in animal tissue, also abundant in bile and gallstones.

Chronic—Of long duration, often years.

Chyme—The thick liquid mixture of partly digested food and stomach juices that passes from the stomach into the intestines.

Cimetidine (brand name Tagamet)—A drug used to control ulcer pain and to aid in the healing of peptic ulcers by cutting down on the amount of acid the stomach secretes.

Cirrhosis—A chronic liver condition characterized by the growth of fibrous scar tissue, liver cell damage and regeneration, and distortion of liver structure. Cirrhosis can lead to failure of the liver to perform some of its critically important functions such as filtering out drugs and toxins, including alcohol, from the blood.

Colitis—Inflammation of the colon.

Collagen—The major protein in connective tissue, for example, in cartilage and bone.

Collateral vessel—A side branch of a blood vessel providing an alternative pathway for blood when blood flow in the main vessel is blocked.

Colon—The part of the large intestine extending from the cecum to the rectum.

Colonoscope—A long, flexible, narrow endoscope passed through the anus to look into the colon.

Colostomy—The surgical procedure connecting an opening of the colon to a surgically created hole on the body's surface.

Common bile duct obstruction—Blockage of the tube that allows the bile to pass from the liver to the small intestine.

Computerized tomography (CT) scanning—A diagnostic procedure in which the x-ray source rotates around the patient so that an x-ray beam is sent through the patient from many different angles. The x-rays are read by a computer, which constructs three-dimensional images of the body. CT is a painless procedure.

Congenital—Present at the time of birth.

Constipation—Infrequent and/or difficult passage of stools.

Contractile—Having the property of contracting, changing size.

Crohn's disease (regional enteritis, ileitis)—A chronic recurring inflammatory disease that can affect any part of the gastrointestinal tract but most often affects the ileum or colon.

Cystic duct obstruction—Blockage of the tube that allows bile to flow from the gallbladder into the common bile duct and on to the small intestine.

Cystic fibrosis (CF)—An inherited disease that affects the exocrine (outward secreting) glands, which include mucous and sweat glands. CF affects the pancreas, causing digestive problems, and respiratory system, causing difficulty in breathing and susceptibility to respiratory infections. Its effect on sweat glands can cause salt depletion in hot weather.

Diagnostic imaging—The use of x-ray or ultrasound pictures of the body organs to make diagnoses.

Diarrhea—A condition in which bowel movements are passed more often than usual and in a more or less liquid state.

Dietary fiber—The indigestible, nonstarch material—such as hemicellulose, plant gums, pectins, celluloses—found in the cell walls of plants. Dietary fiber is found in a wide variety of plant foods, including whole grain breads and cereals, fresh fruits and vegetables, and nuts. Because dietary fiber resists digestion in the gastrointestinal tract, it accounts for a significant portion of the solid matter in bowel movements.

Diffuse—Spread about and not limited to a small area.

Digestion—The process of breaking down food into simpler chemical compounds that are capable of being absorbed by the intestine.

Dilation—The condition of being stretched out (distended) beyond normal size. Dilation is an increase in the diameter of a segment of a hollow organ such as the intestine.

Distal—Farthest away from the trunk, midline, heart, or other reference point.

Distention—A visible increase in the waistline, often occurring after meals.

Diuretic—A substance that causes an increased flow of urine.

Diverticula—Plural of diverticulum.

Diverticulitis—A condition in which diverticula become inflamed.

Diverticulosis—A condition in which small sacs (diverticula) form in the wall of the colon. This condition is common among older people.

Diverticulum—A small sac that forms on the wall of a hollow organ (usually the colon). The plural form is diverticula.

Duodenum—The first part of the small intestine.

Dyspepsia—Another name for indigestion.

Early satiety—Feeling full before completing a normal-sized meal. (The definition of “normal” varies with each individual.)

Edema—An accumulation of too much fluid between cells, causing swelling of the involved area. Edema is most often seen in the lower legs, feet, and around the eyes.

Endoscope—A small, flexible tube-like instrument, with a light on the end of it and consisting of thousands of tiny glass fibers, that allows a doctor to see into the esophagus, stomach, duodenum, and colon. An endoscope also allows a doctor to perform biopsies, take color photographs, and perform certain medical procedures that would otherwise require surgery.

Endoscope papillotomy—After endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (see below) has been performed, a catheter (tube) with a wire is placed into the bile duct draining into the duodenum so that gallstones can be removed from the common bile duct.

Endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP)—A diagnostic examination performed by a physician through an endoscope. A catheter is placed through the endoscope into the opening where the bile ducts and pancreas enter the duodenum and dye is injected. An x-ray is taken during the injection to permit the doctor to see the system of ducts.

Endoscopy—A procedure in which an endoscope is used.

Enteritis—Inflammation of the small intestine.

Enterostomal therapy (ET) nurse—A nurse skilled in caring for and teaching ostomy patients.

Enzyme—A protein that speeds up certain chemical processes. In the intestine, enzymes are needed to break down many foods into simpler substances so that they can be absorbed.

Esophagitis—Inflammation of the esophagus.

Esophagus—The organ that connects the mouth with the stomach.

Excoriation—The breakdown of skin.

Excrete—To discharge wastes from the blood or body tissues.

Failure to thrive—A condition in which an infant does not develop or grow normally.

Familial polyposis—A rare, inherited disease in which many growths (polyps) occur in the colon. People who have this disease have an extremely high risk of developing colon cancer.

Fatty acid—Any acid derived from fats.

Feces—Solid body wastes, passed as bowel movements.

Fermentation—The process by which bacteria break down substances, yielding alcohols, acids, and gases. In the colon, bacteria break down undigested bits of food, releasing hydrogen and carbon dioxide.

Fiber—The part of a plant that is not digested. Fiber plays a role in controlling the consistency of stool and the speed at which it is moved through the digestive system.

Fiber optics—A technology that uses bundles of glass or plastic fibers to transmit light and/or images; used widely in flexible viewing instruments such as an endoscope to allow a doctor to see an organ.

Fissure—A deep crack.

Fistula—An abnormal hollow connection between two internal organs or between an internal organ and the outside of the body.

Flatulence—The passage of gas through the rectum—a normal occurrence—but troublesome if the frequency or volume is excessive or if the sound or odor is offensive.

Flatus—Gas that is passed by the rectum.

Fluoroscope—A device used to examine the organs of the digestive tract by means of x-rays.

Functional disorder—A disorder in which there are no visible signs of disease, yet sometimes the intestinal tract does not seem to function properly. Such a disorder can cause discomfort but is not life threatening and never leads to serious disease.

Gallbladder—A sac located beneath the liver that stores bile. The gallbladder can store about 1/2 pint of bile, which is emptied through the bile ducts to the duodenum after food is eaten.

Gallstone disease (gallbladder disease)—The condition of having gallstones in the gallbladder or lodged in one of the ducts leading to or from the gallbladder.

Gallstones—Solid masses that form in the gallbladder or bile ducts. Stones are composed largely of cholesterol and bilirubin in varied proportions.

Gastrectomy (partial)—A surgical procedure in which a portion of the stomach is removed.

Gastric—Located in the stomach, as in “gastric ulcer.”

Gastric juices—Liquids produced in the stomach to aid digestion and kill bacteria.

Gastric mucosa—The inner lining of the stomach.

Gastric resection—A surgical procedure in which part or all of the stomach is removed.

Gastric ulcer—An open sore on the lining of the stomach.

Gastritis—Inflammation of the lining of the stomach.

Gastrocolic reflex—A mass movement of the contents of the colon that causes the urge to have a bowel movement 30 to 60 minutes after eating. The strength of the reflex is directly related to the number of calories in a meal, especially the amount of fat in a meal.

Gastroenteritis—Inflammation of the lining of both the stomach and the intestine.

Gastroenterologist—A doctor who specializes in treating diseases and disorders of the digestive system.

Gastroscopy—Visual inspection of the stomach through a long, flexible tube with a light on the end that is swallowed by the patient.

Glucose—The most common simple sugar found in nature.

Gluten—A protein in cereal grains. Wheat, rye, barley, and oats contain the gliadin subfraction of gluten that is toxic to persons with celiac sprue.

Granulation—A grainy growth made up of new tissue, which usually appears on raw or irritated skin surfaces. It is part of the healing process.

Guaiac test (occult blood test)—A diagnostic test in which a tiny amount of the material to be tested (usually feces) is rubbed on a slide. A chemical reaction is performed to assess the presence or absence of blood, which may not be visible on direct inspection of the specimen.

Hemorrhoids—Dilation of the veins in the anal area. The problems associated with hemorrhoids occur when these veins become enlarged, prolapsed, or become plugged or inflamed.

Hepatitis—A disease in which the liver is inflamed. A virus infection usually is the cause of hepatitis, although sometimes toxins or drugs are the cause.

Hepatitis B vaccine—A newly developed preparation that is used to prevent virus B hepatitis (formerly called serum hepatitis) by stimulating the body to develop antibodies against the virus. The vaccine requires three injections to be effective.

Hepatologist—A physician who specializes in liver problems.

Hereditary—A term used to describe conditions that are passed genetically from parents to children.

Hiatus hernia (hiatal hernia)—A condition in which part of the stomach slides up through the diaphragm into the chest cavity. Although usually symptomless, when symptoms do occur they are usually due to a weak lower esophageal sphincter (LES) causing heartburn and not to the hiatal hernia itself.

Hormones—Chemicals formed in the body that help regulate body functions, including growth, metabolism, and reproduction. They are produced by cells in one part of the body and carried in the bloodstream to other cells where they exert their effects.

Hydrochloric acid (HCl)—A strong acid produced in the stomach that works with pepsin and other enzymes to digest proteins.

Ileoanal anastomosis—A surgical procedure in which the entire colon together with the diseased inner lining of the rectum is removed, leaving the outer muscle coats of the rectum intact. The end of the ileum is tunneled through the remaining rectum and joined to the anus. Because the rectal muscles and anal valve are left intact, stools can be passed normally.

Ileocolitis—Inflammation of the ileum and colon.

Ileostomy—The surgical creation of an opening from the ileum to the surface of the body.

Ileum—The lowest part or end of the small intestine.

Impaction—A hardened mass of stool difficult to pass from the body.

Indigestion—A term used to indicate any disruption in the digestive process. Symptoms commonly include heartburn, nausea, bloating, and gas. Doctors often call it dyspepsia.

Infectious diarrhea (traveler's diarrhea)—A diarrheal illness caused by an infectious agent: bacterial, viral, or protozoan.

Inflammation—A condition in which the body is trying to respond to localized injury or destruction of tissues. All or some of these signs are present: redness, heat, swelling, pain, and loss of function.

Inflammatory bowel disease—A name for a group of disorders in which various parts of the intestinal tract are inflamed. The most common disorders are ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease.

Intestinal flora—The name for the bacteria, yeasts, and fungi that normally grow in the intestinal tract.

Intestinal mucosa (intestinal lining)—The surface lining of the intestines in which the process of absorption occurs.

Intravenous feeding—A procedure in which necessary fluids, salts, and nutrients are supplied to the body by way of the veins.

Irrigation—The washing out of a cavity or wounded surface with a stream of fluid.

Irritable bowel syndrome (spastic colon, mucous colitis)—A common functional disorder characterized by gas, abdominal pain, and by diarrhea or constipation or alternately by both.

Jaundice—A condition in which the skin and eyes turn yellow because of increased levels of bilirubin in the blood. This happens whenever the flow of bile from the liver to the gallbladder is blocked, when the liver is severely diseased, or when too much bilirubin is produced by excessive red blood cell destruction.

Jejunum—The section of the small intestine between the duodenum and ileum.

Lactase—An intestinal enzyme that is needed to digest lactose.

Lactose—A complex sugar found in milk and milk products (also the principal sugar found in these products). Lactose must be broken down into the simple sugars galactose and glucose to be absorbed.

Lactose intolerance—A common condition in which a person does not produce enough lactase to digest the lactose in milk or milk products. It is commonly associated with abdominal cramping and diarrhea after drinking milk or eating dairy products. This problem is present in over 80 percent of nonwhite adults.

Laparoscope—An endoscope that is used to examine the peritoneal (abdominal) cavity and the surface of the organs it contains.

Laparoscopy—Examination of the interior of the abdominal cavity by a lighted tube.

Large intestine—The part of the intestinal tract that extends from the ileum to the anus. The large intestine is divided into the appendix, cecum, colon (ascending, transverse, descending, and sigmoid), rectum, and anus.

Lateral—To the right or left of the middle line of the body or other reference point.

Lecithin—A waxy substance found in bile that assists the bile salts in dissolving fats.

Lesion—A wound or injury.

Lignin—The major noncarbohydrate kind of dietary fiber. Lignin is a natural plastic binder for cellulose fibers. Together with cellulose, lignin forms the woody cell walls of vegetables and other plants and the cementing material between them.

Lower esophageal sphincter (LES)—Muscle fibers near the junction of the esophagus and the stomach, which are designated to function as a one-way valve. Normally the LES relaxes with swallowing to allow food to pass from the esophagus to the stomach, but stays tight the rest of the time to prevent the backflow of stomach contents into the esophagus.

Lumen—A cavity or channel within a tube or tubular organ. In the intestine, it is the channel through which unabsorbed food, secretions, and wastes flow.

Malabsorption—A condition in which the intestine has a less than normal ability to digest or absorb foodstuffs, which reduces the nutrients a person receives. Unabsorbed food may cause diarrhea and gas.

Malignant—Cancerous.

Maturation—The process of reaching full development or growth.

Megavitamin—A vitamin dosage that far exceeds the amount needed for normal maintenance of life. Megavitamin dosages may be dangerous and/or toxic.

Metabolism—All the chemical reactions occurring within a living cell.

Metabolites—The products of chemical reactions within body cells.

Metastasis—The spread of disease from its original site to another part of the body.

Motility—The ability to move; in this case, all movements of the intestines.

Mucilages—A kind of dietary fiber. Similar to plant gums, mucilages are water soluble, sticky substances that are found in plants, especially seeds.

Mutual help group—A small group of people having the same problem(s) who gather on a regular basis to share information, experiences, fears, and tips on coping, and who provide each other with emotional support.

Nocturnal pain—Pain that occurs during the night.

Noninvasive—A term used to describe procedures that do not require any injection into or surgical penetration of the body.

Obstruction—Blockage or clogging of a vessel, duct, etc., that prevents liquids or solids from flowing through the area and results in a buildup of pressure above the obstruction.

Occult bleeding (hidden bleeding)—Bleeding that is not visible on gross inspection.

Oral cholecystogram (gallbladder x-ray)—A diagnostic procedure in which x-rays are taken of the gallbladder. The procedure is designed to test the function of the gallbladder and to detect gallstones within it. X-rays are taken of the gallbladder after a patient swallows a contrast agent such as a barium meal.

Ostomy—A surgical procedure in which a new body opening is created. Usually refers to an opening in the abdomen for the discharge of stool or urine.

Pancreas—A gland, located next to the duodenum and behind the stomach, that produces the most important juices to digest food.

Pancreatitis—Inflammation of the pancreas.

Pectins—A kind of dietary fiber. Pectins are chemicals related to carbohydrates and are found in fruits and vegetables. The most common characteristic of pectins is that they jell at room temperature when sugar is added.

Pepsin—An enzyme produced in the stomach that breaks down protein into simpler molecules.

Peptic ulcer—An open sore on the lining of the esophagus, stomach, or duodenum. An ulcer in the stomach is called a gastric ulcer; an ulcer in the duodenum, a duodenal ulcer.

Percutaneous transhepatic cholangiography—A diagnostic test in which an x-ray is taken of the gallbladder and bile ducts after a needle has been passed through the skin, ribs, and liver so that dye can be injected into the liver's duct network.

Perforated ulcer—An ulcer that has extended through the full thickness of the wall of the stomach or the duodenum, allowing stomach juice to leak into the peritoneal cavity.

Perforation—An abnormal hole in the wall of a hollow organ.

Perineal—Relating to the perineum.

Perineum—The area between the thighs, extending from the anus to the external genitals.

Peristalsis—Progressive wavelike muscular contractions that move materials through the upper GI tract.

Peritoneum—The lining of the abdominal cavity.

Peritonitis—Inflammation of the lining of the abdominal cavity (peritoneum), usually due to intestinal perforation.

Polyposis—The presence of several polyps.

Polyps—Any mass of tissue that protrudes from the mucous lining of an organ such as the intestine.

Polysaccharides—Carbohydrates that can be broken down into two or more simple sugars.

Proctitis—Inflammation of the rectum lining.

Proctologist—A doctor who specializes in treating disorders of the anus and rectum.

Proctoscope—A short, rigid metal tube that can be inserted into the rectum and anus, permitting an internal examination of these organs.

Prognosis—The prediction of what is likely to happen in a disease; a forecast of the outcome of a disease.

Prolapse—The falling down or slipping of a body part from its usual position.

Proximal—Next to or nearest to a point of reference.

Pylorus—The opening from the stomach into the duodenum.

Ranitidine—A drug used to control ulcer pain and to aid in the healing of peptic ulcers by cutting down on the amount of acid the stomach secretes.

Rectum—The extreme lower end of the large intestine leading to the anus.

Rectus muscles—The two abdominal muscles that run from the lower ribs to the pelvis on either side of the midline and are responsible for maintaining abdominal "tone."

Reflux—A backward flow; regurgitation.

Reflux esophagitis—Inflammation of the esophagus because of the backwash of stomach contents into the esophagus.

Regurgitation—The backward flow of gas, gastric juice, or small amounts of food from the stomach to the mouth.

Resection—A surgical procedure in which something is removed. Whatever is removed is said to have been resected.

Retraction—The act of drawing back, the condition of being drawn back.

Sigmoidoscope—A rigid or flexible endoscope used to look into the anus, rectum, and sigmoid colon.

Silent gallstones—Gallstones that cause no symptoms and are discovered by x-ray, ultrasound, or during surgery.

Small bowel enema—A diagnostic procedure in which a tiny tube is passed through the nose or mouth and placed in the upper part of the small intestine. A small amount of barium liquid is injected through the tube and observed on a fluoroscope as it passes through the small intestine.

Small bowel follow-through—A diagnostic procedure in which x-rays are taken of the small intestine as the barium liquid passes through it.

Small intestine—The largest part of the digestive tube that connects the stomach to the large intestine. The small intestine is divided into the duodenum, jejunum, and ileum and is the site where most of the digestion and food absorption occurs.

Sphincter—A ringlike band of muscle that constricts a passage or closes a natural body opening.

Splenic flexure syndrome—Gaseous distention in the left, upper portion of the colon leading to left, upper abdominal discomfort, which may radiate to the left chest and be confused with heart disease.

Steatorrhea—A condition in which there is too much fat in the stool, usually leading to loose, greasy, and odorous stools.

Stenosis—The pathologic narrowing of a body opening, a hollow tube, or the digestive tract.

Sterols—The alcohol form of a steroid.

Stoma—An artificial opening. For example, an opening in the abdominal wall created by surgery.

Stomach—The large, irregularly shaped sac that is found between the esophagus and the small intestine.

Stool—Feces; the waste matter discharged from the anus.

Stress ulcers—Acute upper GI ulcers that occur following physical trauma such as surgery, major burns, or critical head trauma.

Stricture—A narrowing of a hollow tube.

Sucralfate—A drug that forms a protective coating around the base of an ulcer.

Sulfasalazine—A medication combining a sulfa component with a drug in the aspirin family. Sulfasalazine is used to treat mild to moderate attacks of inflammatory bowel disease and also to maintain a state of remission between attacks. The drug is thought to be more effective when the disease is in the colon than in the ileum.

Total parenteral nutrition (TPN)—The intravenous infusion of all nutrients through a catheter placed in a large vein near the collar bone. TPN is used to ensure that severely ill or malnourished patients receive adequate nutrition, to rest the bowel, or to prepare poorly nourished patients for surgery.

Toxin—A substance that has harmful effects on the body.

Tropical sprue—A condition of unknown cause in which abnormalities of the intestinal lining interfere with the normal absorption of food. This leads to excess fat in the stool. It is also characterized by anemia.

Tubules—Small tubes.

Tumor—A swelling or enlargement of body tissue that performs no useful function. It can be either harmless (benign) or cancerous (malignant).

Ulcer—An open sore on the skin surface or on a mucous surface such as the lining of the stomach.

Ulcerative colitis—A chronic inflammatory disease of the large intestine (colon) lining.

Ultrasound (ultrasonic imaging, echoscanning, ultrasonography)—A diagnostic test in which sound pulses are sent into the body. The returning echoes are collected and a picture is produced from them. Ultrasound uses the same technology as sonar.

Upper GI series (barium meal)—A diagnostic procedure in which x-rays are taken after the patient swallows a liquid containing barium. The barium liquid helps to outline the esophagus, stomach, and duodenum so that they show up clearly on x-ray.

Ursodeoxycholic acid—A drug, similar to chenodeoxycholic acid, that is being tested for safety and effectiveness in dissolving gallstones.

Vagotomy—A surgical procedure in which the nerves to the stomach are severed.

Vagus nerve—The nerves to the stomach that play a role in the production of stomach acid.

Varices—Abnormally dilated (stretched) veins.

Wilson's disease—An inherited disorder in which increased copper can be found in the liver. The disorder can lead to progressive destruction of the liver and cirrhosis and also can have effects on the central nervous system.

What Is the Digestive Diseases Clearinghouse?

The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse is a service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), National Institutes of Health. Mandated by Congress to coordinate a national effort to educate the public, patients and their families, and physicians and other health care providers, the Digestive Diseases Clearinghouse works closely with more than 20 organizations to promote a wider understanding of digestive health and disease. The Clearinghouse provides services in three major areas: inquiry response and referral; publication development, review, and distribution; and resource coordination.

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